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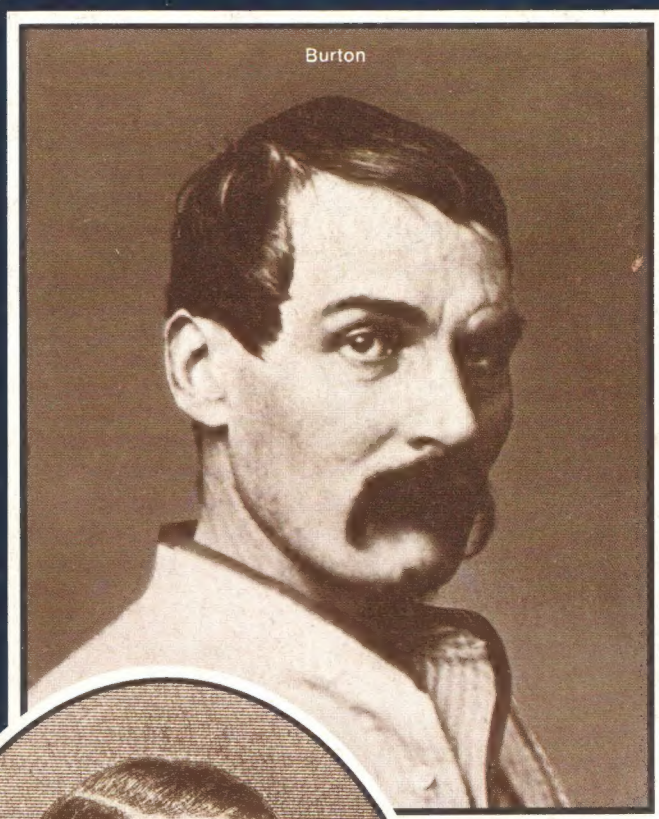
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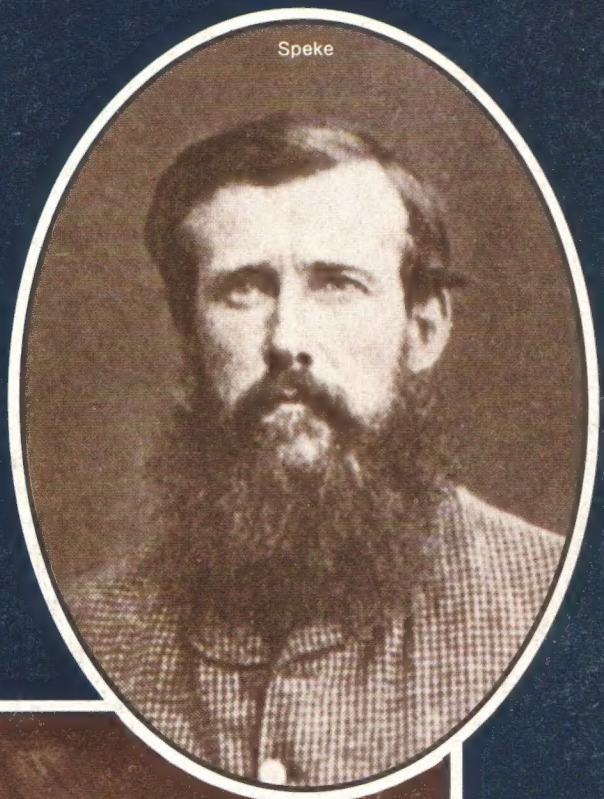
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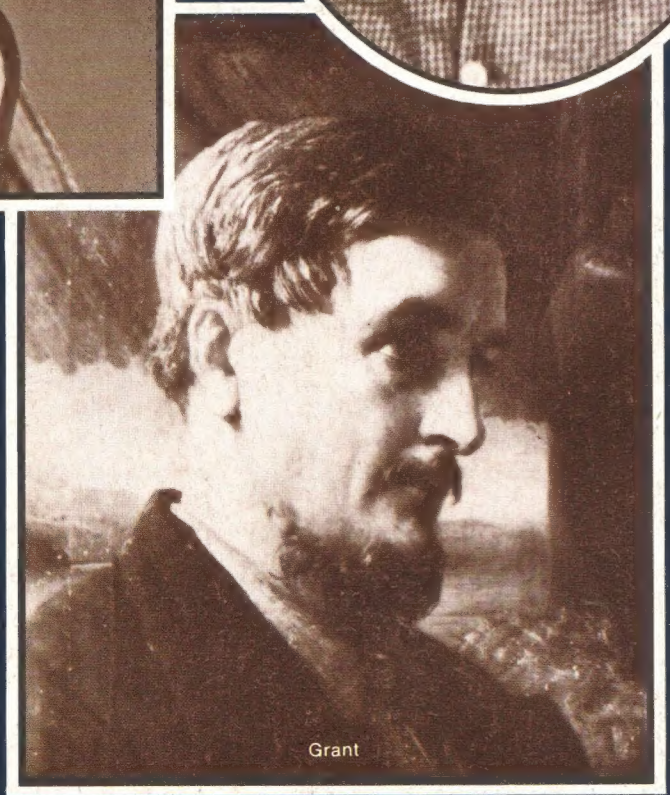
Grant

The Men Who Found THE SOURCE OF THE NILE

Australia & New Zealand 70c South Africa 70c Canada 95c

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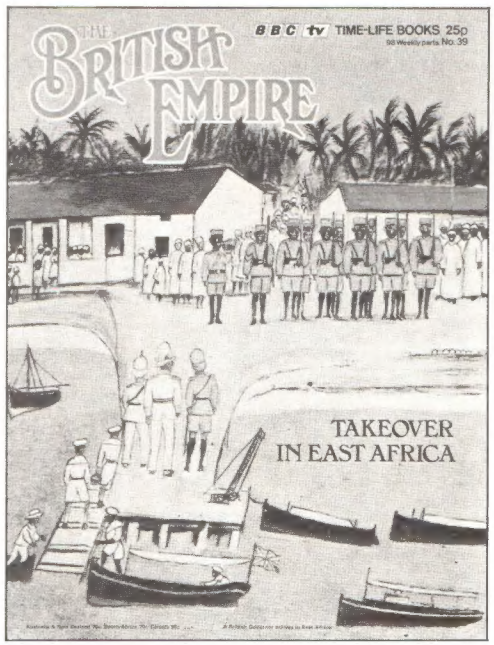
No. 38. From Suez to Khartoum. The need to protect the Suez Canal and the death of Charles Gordon in Khartoum led Britain to seize control of the Sudan.



No. 39. Takeover in East Africa. After the 'scramble' by European powers to divide Africa, Uganda and Kenya, linked by a strategic railway, attract their first colonists.

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Cover: The satanic Richard Burton dominates portraits of the three other major figures – Speke, Baker and Grant – who also pioneered European exploration to the source of the Nile.

THE SOURCE OF THE NILE

In the middle of the 19th Century, the River Nile, one of the greatest remaining challenges for explorers, still hid its origins behind a barrier of foetid swamps, fatal diseases and ferocious tribesmen. Its mystery was compounded by reports of fabulous lakes and mountains. This challenge fired the imagination of aggressively individualistic British explorers who went out on dangerous and fever-ridden expeditions to find the source of the Nile. They did not want to open up the land for trade or, like Livingstone, to convert the African; they went into this forbidding area only "because it was there."

Successive journeys by Richard Burton, John Speke, James Grant and the Bakers – Samuel and his wife Florence – mapped the Nile to its beginnings and pencilled in the central lakes region of Africa, one of the last remaining blanks on the world map.

The vivid accounts they wrote of their journeys opened Africa for others with different motives – anti-slavery crusaders shocked by revelations of the highly organized Arab slave-trade. Missionaries, traders, speculators and colonists were to follow. Together, they permanently changed the face of Africa ❧

By Roy Lewis

Although most of the world had been mapped by Europeans by the middle of the 19th Century, one of the very oldest and greatest mysteries of geography remained unsolved. Until 1856 no more was known of the source of the Nile, the great river that was the cradle of Western civilization, than had been known to the geographer Ptolemy in A.D. 150. He had reported that the Nile originated in two lakes in Central Africa about 10°S., flanked by Crophi and Mophi, the "Mountains of the Moon." This explanation had been incorporated in a map made by an Arab geographer, Al Idrasi, about A.D. 1100. Most cultured Victorians knew as much as this, but no more. No European explorers had ascended the Nile as far as the Equator.

But the feeling was growing, especially among the influential group of men who composed the Royal Geographical Society, that the time was at hand to settle the matter. They were inspired by the arrival in 1856 of a missionary from the East African Coast, J. J. Erhardt, who brought with him to London a new map of Central Africa, based on the travels of two other missionaries, Johann Rebmann and Johann Ludwig Krapf.

Both men had already reported to incredulous geographers that they had seen snow on the peaks of two huge snow-capped mountains on the Equator – Kilimanjaro and Kenya – sights that led them to wonder whether these mountains drained into a huge basin that gave birth to the Nile. For they had been told by Arab traders who had been taking caravans inland for ivory since about 1840, that there was a vast inland sea extending from about lat. 10°S. north to the Equator. The report of two peaks – the Mountains of the Moon? – and a lake presented a coincidence with Ptolemy's map too obvious to miss.

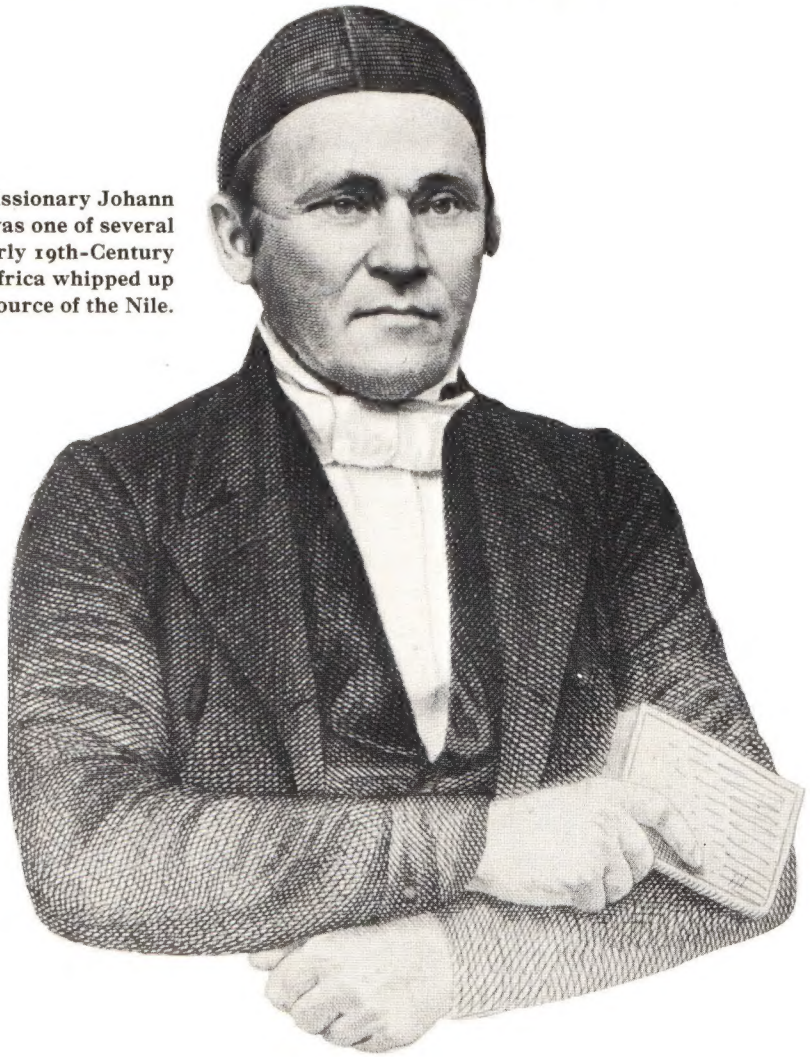
Within a short time after the Society received the map, a swarthy, stern-looking, moustachioed man of 35 offered to take an expedition into the region and clear up all doubts. He was Lieutenant Richard Burton of the East India Company's Bombay Light Infantry. The Society accepted his offer, sufficient money was raised, and the East India Company granted him a furlough. Burton selected as his companions Lieutenant John Hanning Speke and Dr. John Steinhäuser (who, sadly, died before the expedition set forth).

To the Society, the qualifications of Burton and Speke seemed perfectly suited to the task. Burton was already known for his bold exploits in dangerous country, and although he had blighted his prospects in the Indian service by his bluntness in dealing with superior officers (his brother officers called him "Ruffian Dick"), he was not yet the frighteningly controversial figure he was to become. His linguistic abilities, attested in Company examinations, his grasp of Eastern religious and social customs, and his evident valour and resourcefulness made him an obvious leader.

Speke seemed almost as suitable. At this time he was 29 and he had had considerable experience in collecting botanical and zoological specimens in the Himalayas; he was also a surveyor.

Although these two personalities were superficially so complementary, they were in fact utterly incompatible, and the history of Nile exploration for the next 25 years was to be affected by the conflict of two men brought overly close by much shared suffering. The violent personal quarrel between Burton and Speke that followed the 1857 expedition saw armchair geographers taking bitterly opposed sides. The enmity led to the untimely death of Speke, and the relegation of Burton to an insignificant diplomatic post. One unexpected result, however, was Burton's completion in his semi-exile of the masterpiece that is his literary monument, his translation of *The Arabian Nights*.

Other explorers were involved variously: Livingstone who died while trying to clear up the Burton-Speke Nile sources controversy; Stanley who found his vocation in Africa because he found Livingstone on a newspaperman's assignment; James Grant, who joined Speke's second expedition to Central Africa; Sir Samuel Baker because he went to verify Speke's theories and thereby became involved in the politics of the Egyptian Sudan. The exploits of Livingstone and



The German missionary Johann Ludwig Krapf was one of several explorers whose early 19th-Century exploits in Central Africa whipped up British interest in the source of the Nile.

The map (right) shows the routes taken by the early explorers in the central region of Africa, an area that was not accurately mapped until well into the 20th Century.

Burton & Speke 1857-59
Speke (to Lake Victoria) 1858
Speke & Grant 1860-63
Baker 1863-64
Baker 1872-73
EQUATORIA
Gondokoro
White Nile
Faloro
Fatiko
Murchison Falls
Lake Albert
Masindi
Mrooli
Lake Kyoga
BUNYORO
BUGANDA
River Semliki
Victoria Nile
RUWENZORI RANGE
Ripon Falls
(MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON)
SOMALILAND
Equator
Equator
Lake Edward
MOUNT KENYA
Lake Victoria
KARAGWE
MASAILAND
Lake Kivu
SPEKE GULF
Mwanza
River Ruzizi
MOUNT KILIMANJARO
Mombasa
Ujiji
Kazeh
Zanzibar
Bagamoyo
ZANZIBAR
Zungomero
Lake Tanganyika
Lake Nyasa

Stanley have been treated in a previous chapter; these pages are concerned with the interlocking chronicles of Burton, Speke, Grant and Baker.

Richard Burton, first son of an Army officer who was retired on half-pay for chivalrously refusing to testify against Queen Caroline in the divorce action brought against her by George IV, had an unconventional upbringing even for the profligate Regency period. Apart from an interlude in a kind of Dickensian "Dotheboys Hall" to which his father diverted him from entry to Eton, Richard and his brother and sister were coached by a series of browbeaten tutors as the Burton family moved erratically through France and Italy. From this strange education there emerged a faulty classicist, but a first-rate swordsman.

Burton believed his mother's story that he was descended morganatically from Louis XIV of France. The saturnine, red-haired blue-eyed lad not only had the name of the Romany tribe of Burtons, but looked like one; to complete the identification he learned the Romany tongue from a gipsy mistress in the course of the Burtons' travels on the Continent. During that time he had also developed a taste for wine, women, fighting, gambling, mysticism, daredevilry and, above all, for languages. Languages were the precious tools with which to satisfy his insatiable curiosity about exotic peoples; with languages intimate customs of little-known tribes could be studied, and, once studied, defended against conventional opinion.

Self-confident, undisciplined, devoid of tact or even consideration, Richard Burton revealed himself in his own words: "I was always of the opinion that a man proved his valour by doing what he likes." Sent finally to Oxford, he found that his prowess in French, Italian, Béarnais and Provençal did not excuse his insistence on speaking Latin with an Italian lilt and his condemnation of his professors' accent. He contumaciously demanded a tutor in Arabic, condemned an Empire that did not teach the language of its vast Muslim population, and was sent down without a degree.

After this disastrous début Burton took up one of the few options open to a young gentleman in his impecunious position: he became an officer in the Indian Army, for in this branch of the service it was not necessary to buy a commission. But such a commission left its holder forever after despised by the Regulars, no matter whether an Indian Army officer had seen much more action than a Regular officer.

In India Burton's rapid mastering of Persian, Afghan, Hindi, Urdu and Arabic won him the friendship of Sir Charles Napier, conqueror of Sind, to whom he rendered superlative service as an Intelligence officer. But the fact that he had passed as native in the bazaars (however necessary this was to a spy) and, worse still, his detailed report on pederasty in Sind (though asked for by his superiors) disgusted the Company's directors. They were touched to the quick when he told them that they were losing touch with their subjects (he sent them a prediction that approximated the date of the Mutiny of 1857). And the Army furiously reprimanded him for the impertinence of criticizing British bayonet drill (though his manual on the subject was adopted almost without acknowledgement after the disasters of the Crimean War). His attempt to abduct a nun in Goa completed his disgrace.

Burton determined to retrieve his reputation by journeying to Mecca, the holy city of the Muslims, which infidels were forbidden to enter on pain of death. In 1853, he left his clothes with a friend in London, and donned an Arab personality so complete that he was able to pass among the most devout Muslims, letter-perfect in his command of the language and the rituals of the religion of Allah. His meticulous preparations had prudently included having himself circumcised. From this visit he emerged with copious notes that he turned into an informative and entertaining book, *A Pilgrimage to El Medinah and Meccah*. Almost immediately, he was world famous.

One year later, he followed up this feat by becoming the first European to enter the Abyssinian city of Harar, another place so holy to Muslims that no European had survived the trip, although at least 30 had made the attempt. Burton had learned of joint proposals by the Royal Geographical Society and the East India Company to survey the hinterland of the Somali coast which was, like Aden, in the purview of India. They were looking for a "fit and proper" person to volunteer to go at his own risk, and

Harar, the Ethiopian city holy to Muslims, had a tradition that it would fall if a "Frank" (Christian) entered its walls. Burton dared death to get there in 1855.

Burton, with Harar in view, applied. He was in Aden planning the expedition, when he found that he had to fill a sudden vacancy in the expedition's ranks. By coincidence there happened to be in Aden another Indian officer, John Hanning Speke, who was eager to join Burton.

The two men found that they had both been looking for excuses to penetrate into Central Africa and there seize "the greatest geographical prize since the discovery of America" – the tracing of the Nile to its source. Each man later insisted that he was first with the idea of finding the course of the Nile by striking inland from the Somali coast. Perhaps both had it. But they concealed it from the authorities. Speke's cover story was that this would be a hunting-trip to Somalia for which he had saved his pay for years; Burton's was his desire to repeat at Harar his Mecca exploit. Neither explanation satisfied the suspicious James Outram, Governor of Aden: he sanctioned only a trip from Berbera to Zanzibar.

Burton achieved his objective by getting in and out of Harar. But Speke's contribution led to disaster. Soon after he met Burton at the coast, their camp was attacked and sacked. Burton and Speke were wounded, a brother officer killed and the expedition was saved from destruction only because a friendly Arab boatman took the survivors back to Aden. Burton, in his report, criticized Speke. None the less he annexed Speke's notes on the botany and zoology of the area to his report. Speke, who had exhausted his savings, felt humiliated and ill-used. Their relationship was already an explosive psychic mixture.

Speke, as fair and charming as Burton was saturnine and sarcastic, came of a Somerset family whose origins went back to the Conquest of 1066. Speke's father had been an Army officer, but he had left the service in 1830 and was content to run his estate as the local squire and enjoy his family. Like Burton, Speke preferred the outdoor life to study. Speke was a fanatic about personal fitness. Dominated by his mother and sisters, awkward with other women, he had a narcissistic tinge to his make-up that gave a special quality to his ambition for fame and acclaim. At 17 he joined the Indian Army, and found action in the Sikh Wars under General Sir Colin Campbell while Burton, who was anathema to his commander, was kept at base.

It was in India that Speke met James Grant, who was to play an important role in the future. The two men shared a passion for hunting and natural history; in this friendship Speke was the impetuous leader, Grant the cautious admiring follower. In 1849, the fighting over, Speke said he "conceived the idea of exploring central equatorial Africa," for which he prepared himself by his mapping of the Himalayan mountain passes.

Thus it was that he joined Burton for the disastrous expedition of 1854. In Aden, he had found Burton assembling an expedition to do the very thing he had been planning for himself and for which he had already bought much equipment. Afterwards, Burton averred that Speke "never *thought* in any way of the Nile and he was astonished at *my* views, which he deemed impracticable." But Speke showed later that he knew how to dissemble, so Burton's report gains credibility. Speke probably felt that he was lucky to get in on Burton's Somali expedition, for it gave him the opportunity to profit from Burton's store of practical experience of exploration.

Despite his blundering during the earlier expedition, Speke was invited by Burton to join his official Lakes Expedition to Central Africa in 1856. The invitation reached Speke in the Crimea, that meeting-place of British notabilities in 1854–56. He travelled night and day to London to accept.

Burton later said that he took Speke "to give him another chance" after his failures and financial losses in Somalia, and felt he could rely on his toughness and prowess – but he expected to have his close friend, the ill-fated Dr. Steinhäuser, with them as well. As for Speke, he was determined to be associated with the Nile discoveries. Perhaps, since he doubted Burton's single-mindedness to see it through, he foresaw an opportunity to advance his own ambitions.

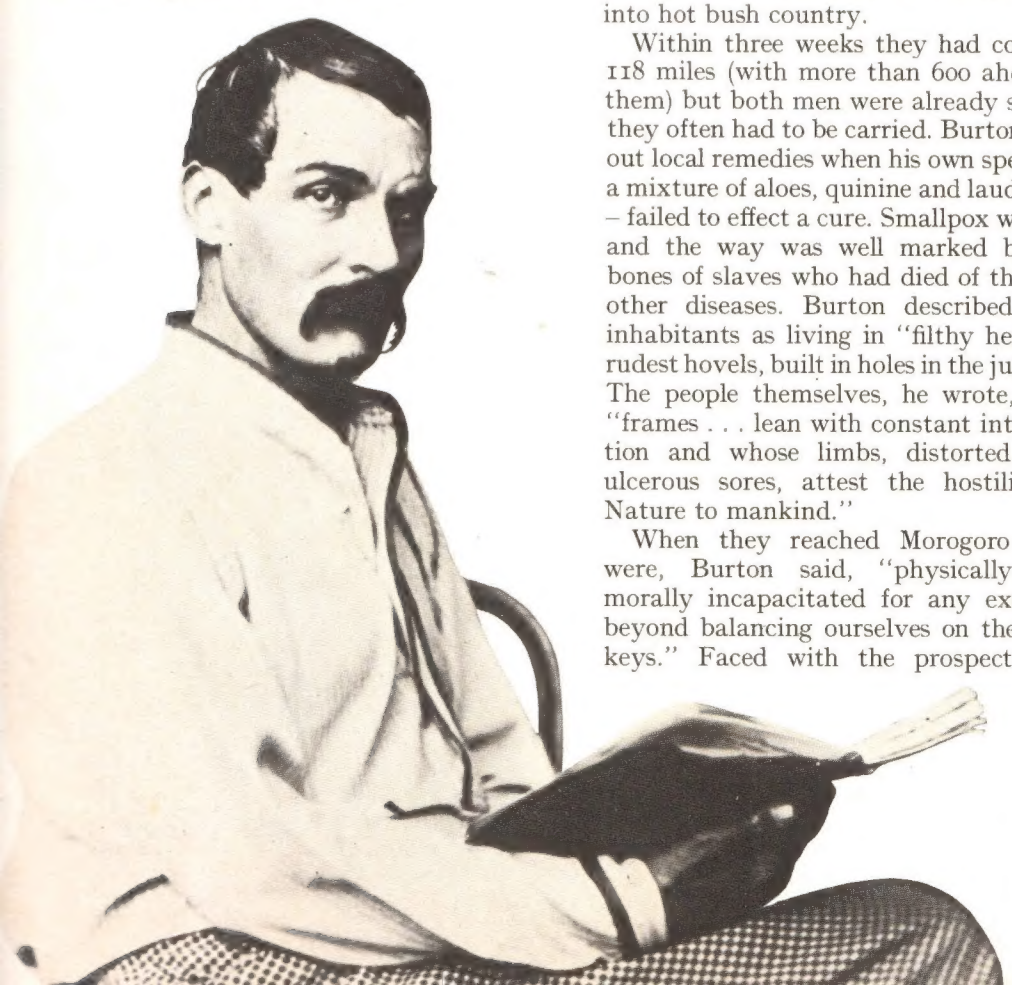
In 1857 the two partners embarked in a warship at Bombay, and landed at Zanzibar. From there they made an exploratory trip to Mombasa with the idea of acclimatizing themselves and to see if the missionary Johann Rebmann

Burton posed as a mixed-stock Afghan-Indian for his mission of 1853 to the Muslim holy of holies, Mecca. As he hoped, his disguise explained any oddities in his normally fluent Arabic.

would accompany them. However, Burton rejected Rebmann when he refused to abstain from preaching en route.

Burton and Speke then considered marching inland to Kilimanjaro and exploring beyond; had they done so, they would have visited Victoria, the largest lake, together. They were later criticized for their decision not to make this trip, but news of the depredations of the Masai warrior tribe, which held the country in thrall, had dissuaded them. Both men contracted bad cases of malaria and returned to Zanzibar in worse condition than when they left.

They then made hasty preparations for the march inland from Bagamoyo. Already the Arab slavers and the Hindu merchants in Zanzibar were making difficulties about equipping the expedition and Burton had to take 30 asses instead of a full complement of porters. With the help of the British Consul, the mortally ill Colonel Atkins Hamerton, who had tried unsuccessfully to get them to abandon their expedition, Burton and Speke assembled their party. It included 36 African porters, ten gun-carrying slaves, four drivers, a posse of Baluchi soldiers to protect them, and four servants, two of whom, Sidi Bombay and Myinyi Mabruki, would later serve other explorers. Without them, British exploration might have been slower.



Richard Burton's face was, to one acquaintance, "the most sinister I have ever seen, dark, cruel, with eyes like a wild beast."

Even this elaborate caravan could not carry all that was needed in the way of provisions, trade goods, camp equipment, ammunition, scientific equipment, medicines and stores, including an iron boat in seven sections, intended to enable them to explore the great lake that was their goal. A second caravan was organized to carry up the additional stores needed. On June 25, 1857, the march began.

Though Burton and Speke were the first Europeans to make the journey to the "Sea of Ujiji," as Lake Tanganyika was called, the trail was far from unknown; it had been a caravan-route since 1824. But one Frenchman who had attempted it had been slaughtered on the way. When Burton overheard the Hindus telling each other that he would never get as far as Ugogo, not a third of the distance, whereupon they would seize all his belongings, he had his moment of despair and wrote in his journal "I felt myself the plaything of misfortune."

Burton wrote more prophetically than he knew. The caravan proved to be only nominally under the command of its European leaders. Its members had contracted to go to Ujiji not only for pay, but also to do some slave-trading on their own account. The column moved at its own pace; indiscipline was the rule, theft endemic, and desertions began as soon as the men marched from the coastal strip into hot bush country.

Within three weeks they had covered 118 miles (with more than 600 ahead of them) but both men were already so sick they often had to be carried. Burton tried out local remedies when his own specific – a mixture of aloes, quinine and laudanum – failed to effect a cure. Smallpox was rife and the way was well marked by the bones of slaves who had died of this and other diseases. Burton described local inhabitants as living in "filthy heaps of rudest hovels, built in holes in the jungle." The people themselves, he wrote, have "frames . . . lean with constant intoxication and whose limbs, distorted with ulcerous sores, attest the hostility of Nature to mankind."

When they reached Morogoro they were, Burton said, "physically and morally incapacitated for any exertion beyond balancing ourselves on the donkeys." Faced with the prospect that Burton and Speke would soon die, and listening to rumours of dreaded Ngoni warriors ahead, the Baluchi soldiers mutinied and had to be quelled by an emaciated Burton who faced them down with a revolver in hand.

Throughout the journey, and despite his ill-health, Burton continued his ethnological studies, which were so uncomplimentary to the black peoples that they are almost unprintable today. But while Speke held himself disdainfully aloof from African customs, Burton, on the other hand, could talk to everybody, for he already had a smattering of Swahili, the hybrid language widely understood in East Africa and he used it with gusto to investigate local mores. He even bought a female slave whose Junoesque proportions, uncertain temper and casual morals gave incident to life in the caravan until they reached Ujiji, when Burton sold her.

By the time they reached Ugogo, half of the supplies intended to last a year had been consumed or stolen. This was serious, because the local tax, called *hongo*, payable to chieftains over whose lands they passed, was rising progressively. And it had to be paid out of the supplies they carried. (*Hongo* was levied because caravans made heavy inroads on a precarious subsistence economy, but it could amount to blackmail proportions.)

The travellers' health improved as they reached the savannah country. At one village, Burton noted that "the women were well-disposed towards strangers with fair complexions, apparently with the permission of their husbands."

Speke and Burton were already on uneasy terms. When his fever developed into delirium, Speke had poured out his resentment at the way Burton had appropriated his zoological collection in Somalia; he threatened that he would not make another to be thus pillaged. He became violent and his weapons had to be removed; when he recovered he kept largely to his own tent.

Finally, tattered and emaciated, the two Englishmen walked into Kazeh (today called Tabora) on November 7, 1857. Speke was almost blind with ophthalmia. There they recuperated for three weeks,

and there Burton learned from the Arab inhabitants that the Erhardt map was wrong. There was not one but three great lakes or seas: the "Sea of Niassa" to the south; the "Sea of Ujiji" (Lake Tanganyika) just ahead; and the "Sea of Ukewere" (Lake Victoria) to the north.

They pushed on hopefully, but Burton again fell so ill that Speke had to take command temporarily. On December 14, they were in sight of Lake Tanganyika, but Speke could not see it, and Burton had to be carried as his legs were paralysed. He gazed at it with "wonder, admiration and delight." Helped by some Arabs, the two men recuperated for a fortnight, and then, despite their disabilities, they attempted to explore the lake in a canoe, much too small a craft for so large a body of water. Burton sent Speke across the lake to hire a dhow, which he proved unable to arrange. This failure angered Burton and convinced him that Speke was wholly unreliable; it was hardly a fair judgment for, owing to an ear infection, Speke was now nearly deaf as well as half-blind.

The most urgent task was to find what outlets there were from the lake, and thus to decide whether the Nile had its origin here. They therefore again set out to explore in canoes – a journey that was agony to both – but were unable to reach the northern end of the lake. But the natives assured them that in the northern end there was a river, the Ruzizi, that flowed *into*, not out of the lake – which meant it could not be the Nile's source.

Their position now appeared to be so desperate that Burton decided to return to Zanzibar with news of the discoveries thus far made. Speke later claimed that he suggested then that they should march north from Ujiji to the "Sea of Ukewere." But Burton felt hardly well enough to do so. Even though the relief caravan had arrived, it had been so badly plundered en route that the goods it brought seemed quite insufficient to enable the party to barter its way onward. Had a further journey been possible, Burton would have discovered that Lake Tanganyika was 400 miles long, not the mere 250 that he and Speke estimated; they also underestimated its altitude.

The exhausted men set off back, but were forced to halt at Kazeh. Burton was still unable to walk, and needed more rest before they could continue on the return journey to Zanzibar. During this time Burton continued imperturbably with his ethnological investigations, which ranged from the power of witch-doctors to the length of African penises.

Speke, however, was irked by the time being wasted. He persuaded Burton to allow him to take a small party on a three-week trek to the reputed "sea" to the north. Burton agreed, partly to get some relief from Speke's company, partly because he was contemptuous of Speke's ability to achieve any useful results on his own. His subsequent account of this momentous decision – in which he did not refer to Speke by name (nor did he ever again) – went as follows:

"My companion who had recovered strength from the repose and the comparative comfort of our headquarters, appeared a fit person to be detached for this duty; moreover his presence at Kazeh was by no means advisable. To associate with Arabs and Anglo-Indians, who are ready to take offence when least intended, who expect servility as their due, and whose morgue of colour induces them to treat all skins a shade darker than their own as 'niggers' is even more difficult than to avoid a rupture when placed between two friends who have quarrelled with each other. Moreover in this case, the difficulty was exaggerated by the Anglo-Indian's [Speke's] complete ignorance of eastern manners and customs, and of any Oriental language.

Speke made a momentously successful foray northwards, and three weeks later, on August 3, 1858, beheld the huge expanse of the "Sea of Ukerewe" which, with the descriptions of the Arabs and the Erhardt map in mind, he decided in a flash of inspiration was at last the Ptolemaic source of the Nile. "This, I maintain," he wrote later, "was *the* discovery of the Nile." He noted of the lake that it was "so broad you could not see across it, and so long that nobody knew its length." He marched to the water's edge at what became known as "Speke Gulf," and hurried back to Burton to announce the great discovery.

Burton at first received the information coldly. Then, while acknowledging that Speke had found *a* lake, demanded

J.H. Speke, Burton's lieutenant on the first African expedition, still remains an enigma. Although Burton scorned him, he commanded unquestioning obedience from others.

what possible proof he had that it was *the* lake? And, of course, in strict geographical logic, Burton was right. But in other respects he was disastrously wrong. His forthright denigration of Speke's achievement further antagonized his companion, while his rejection of Speke's suggestion that they should both go and investigate the lake's true extent was a gross tactical blunder.

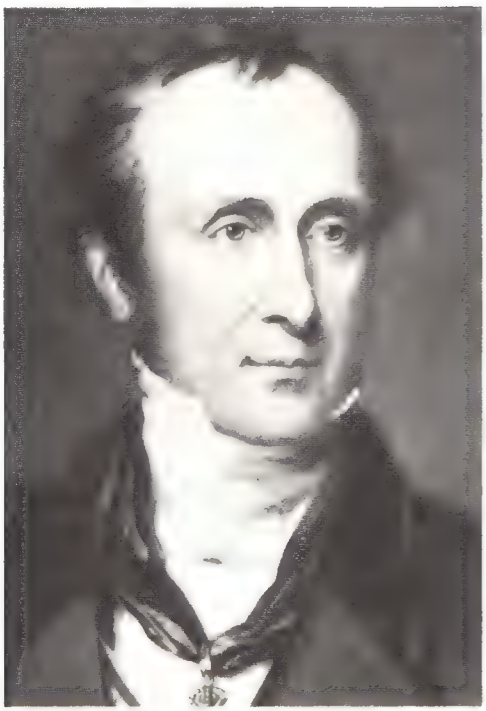
The result was that Speke hugged the "discovery" to himself with the solicitude of a mother for its unborn babe, suspecting that Burton would rob him of the major credit, as he felt had happened with his notes made during the Somalia expedition. Meanwhile, Burton's growing "scientific" scepticism was fuelled by a suppressed fear that he had made a fatal mistake himself. On the way back to Zanzibar, the two men avoided the subject of the Nile, and were soon barely on speaking terms (though when Speke became so ill that he nearly died, Burton nursed him with great solicitude).

Their only point of agreement was that, on their return to London, they should fit out a new expedition to test Speke's theory. But they quarrelled yet again as soon as they reached the Indian Ocean on February 2, 1859. This time it was over the payment of the porters and the unruly soldiers. During the journey, these men had extracted promises which Burton was now disinclined to honour, but which Speke felt should be fulfilled lest other explorers' needs should be prejudiced in the future. The new Consul on Zanzibar, Captain Christopher Rigby, found Speke a man after his own heart. Moreover, Rigby nursed an old grudge against Burton from their days in India. He rejected Burton's views on what had taken place between him and Speke, and his prejudice coloured the reports he sent to London.

When the explorers returned to Aden, their friendly relationship was merely a polite veneer covering profound hostility. They found a vessel available to take them home immediately. Speke seized this piece of good luck. But Burton, in a pattern of behaviour often repeated, overlooked the importance of prompt public presentation of his claims, and dallied in Aden for some days on a plea of continuing ill-health. In fact, his delay was partly to avoid Speke's presence, now nearly intolerable to his spirit.

Speke promised to say nothing of their discoveries until Burton rejoined him in London. But on the ship he met an old acquaintance, Laurence Oliphant, a journalist and mystic, who quickly drew him out. On Oliphant's advice Speke went to Sir Roderick Murchison, the President of the Royal Geographical Society, to claim the Nile immediately the ship docked. This caused an immediate sensation and, knowing nothing of the quarrel between Speke and Burton, Murchison said: "Speke, we must send you there again."

When Burton arrived, he found that his chance of a lifetime was gone forever – "the ground was completely cut from beneath my feet." Speke had been promised command of the new expedition, and although the Society might have reversed this tentative decision, in view of the dispute that had now emerged into the open in full, virulent force, in fact it had to be confirmed. Burton received the Society's coveted Gold Medal, but Speke was the hero of the hour, the lion of the drawing-rooms



The distinguished geologist, Sir Roderick Murchison, was President of the Royal Geographical Society and thus had the final say in who went where in Africa.

with his fresh boyish charm and shyness that was in such pleasant contrast to Burton's uncomfortable erudition and contempt for convention.

Burton wrote his account, *The Lake Regions of Central Africa*, which almost ignored Speke, who told his own story with venom in *Blackwood's Magazine*.

He then took sick-leave to visit the United States. There, he reported on Salt Lake City, headquarters of the Mormons, as a kind of new "holy city" which he compared with Mecca and Harar; typically he had a good word to say for Mormon polygamy but none for Mormon prudery. He hoped to see service in the American Indian Wars, but, foiled in that desire, he returned to England to find himself out of fashion and out of money. He now made what many of his admirers have subsequently thought an even greater mistake: he married Isabel Arundell a passionate, romantic and bigoted Catholic girl, who had loved him for ten years, but whose family opposed the match. There was no possibility of her helping him in his career or understanding his linguistic and literary powers.

Thereafter, Burton declined into the most eccentric member of the consular service, generally given the most unpleasant postings that the Foreign Office had on its books.

For his new expedition to Central Africa, Speke selected as his companion his old friend James Grant, who was prepared to accept from Speke the subordinate position that Speke had rebelled against with Burton. The partnership of Speke and Grant was to be harmonious, for they shared the same outlook and the same love of hunting and natural history.

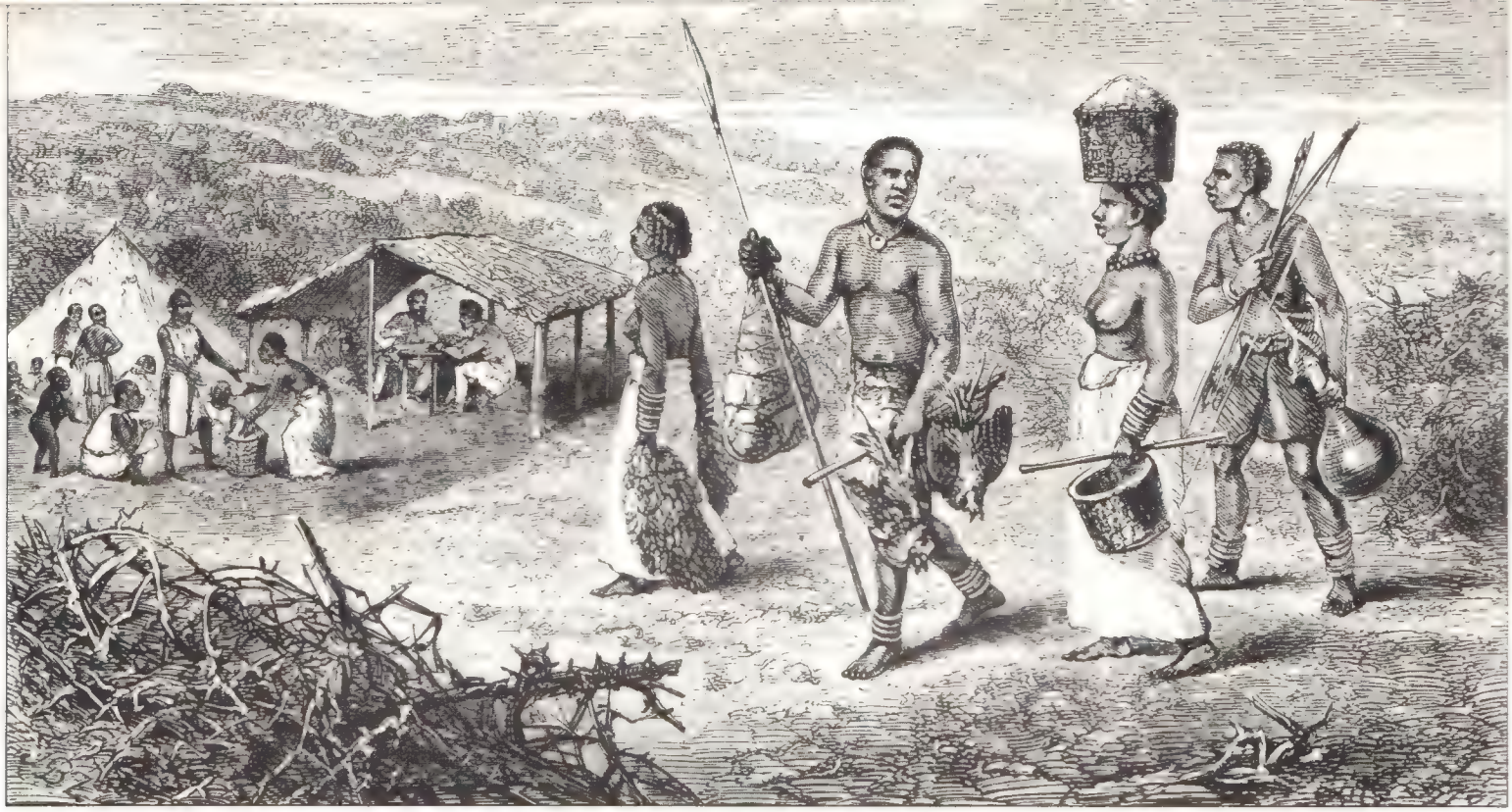
The Royal Geographical Society and the Foreign Office now worked out a combined operation. Speke and Grant were to go from Zanzibar to the "Sea of Ukewere" (now called "Lake Victoria"). John Petherick, the British Consul in Khartoum who was also an ivory-trader familiar with the upper reaches of the Nile, would advance southwards and rendezvous with Speke's party at the northern end of the lake. The meeting was to take place around December, 1861. Petherick, however, was given inadequate funds to prepare for his journey.

Zanzibar, whose ivory and slave markets made it the centre of East African trade, furnished the Nile explorers with the men and goods they needed. One East African currency was American cotton, called "merikani," which was imported in a vessel like the one anchored on the left.

THE SECRET REVEALED

On his first sight of Lake Victoria, John Hanning Speke was convinced that the Nile must rise here, but he had no proof: he had no idea of exactly where the great river started or of how it reached mapped regions. These gaps in geographical knowledge were filled by two subsequent explorations. The first, headed by Speke himself and James Grant, led to a European standing for the first time at the actual headwaters of the Nile. The second expedition was led by an intrepid big-game hunter, Samuel Baker, and his wife Florence. These two were to discover Lake Albert, through which the Nile flowed on its long journey to the Mediterranean.

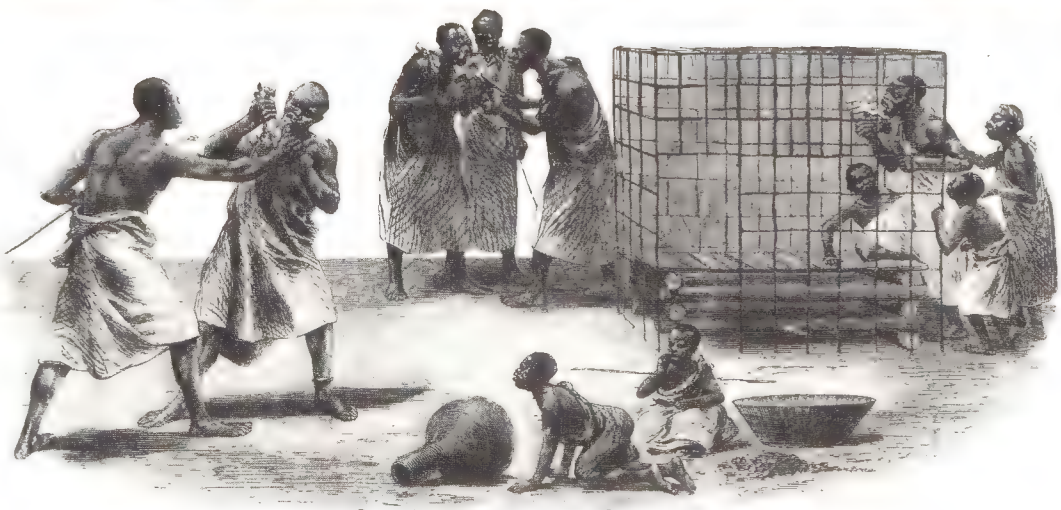
This portrait of Grant (left) and Speke includes a romanticized likeness of Sidi Bombay, a bearer who was so trustworthy that he was employed on several Nile expeditions. In fact Bombay, far from being a black Adonis, was middle aged and ugly, with teeth filed to poin



The tribesmen of Usui, the last area before Uganda, bring much-needed provisions for Speke and Grant to buy as they rest under a grass shelter. The wily tribesmen charged high prices – having previously demanded exorbitant taxes as a guarantee of safe conduct.

To demonstrate his friendship, Grant joins a chaotic tribal dance with a minor chieftain, Ukulima, who used to "stick the hands and heads of his victims on poles."

Seated on stools, Speke and Grant attend an audience with King Mutesa, who, surrounded by his symbols of royalty – spear, shield and white dog – is offered beer by a wife.



Mutesa's palace guards, selected for their aggressiveness, fight over their daily rations of beef and plantains. Their cowskin robes were a sign of their position.

A Killer King's Hospitality

On his way to pinpoint the exact source of the Nile, Speke spent some fascinating months at the Court of the ferocious Mutesa, the Kabaka of Buganda, the most powerful of the three Kings who ruled in Uganda.

Mutesa's people, like all Ugandans, were quite sophisticated. They had developed advanced artefacts, such as 70-foot war-canoes and 50-foot conical buildings. Their meat stews and varied fruits formed a gourmet diet compared with that eaten in the rest of Central Africa. Though an absolute ruler, Mutesa was advised by a group of counsellors with clearly defined positions, from Commander-in-Chief to Chief Brewer.

But there were gaps in the Ugandans' civilization. They had no wheel or plough, and the Kabaka ruled through pure terror, with cruelty that was as arbitrary as it was savage. On his succession, the new King had burnt his 60 brothers alive, one of the many grisly Ugandan traditions used to forestall intra-dynastic rebellion.

The strutting walk of Mutesa was meant to imitate the majestic stride of the lion. Speke, however, was not impressed, thinking it to be "a very ludicrous kind of waddle."

One of Mutesa's Queens is dragged out to die, a common sight at Court, where a minor offence, like talking too loudly, could bring a death sentence.

Baker of the Nile

Samuel Baker, Speke's old hunting companion from India, though ostensibly in Africa to search for the overdue Speke and Grant, had secretly decided to discover the Nile's source if they had failed. But to his chagrin, the two explorers staggered into Baker's base at Gondokoro on the Upper Nile with the news that they had succeeded. Wistfully, Baker asked if there were not "one leaf of the laurel left for me?"

There was indeed. Neither Speke nor Grant had discovered whether the river flowing out of Lake Victoria passed through another great lake before continuing its journey. Husband and wife determined to find out and Baker left a lively account of the expedition to the lake he was to name after Prince Albert.

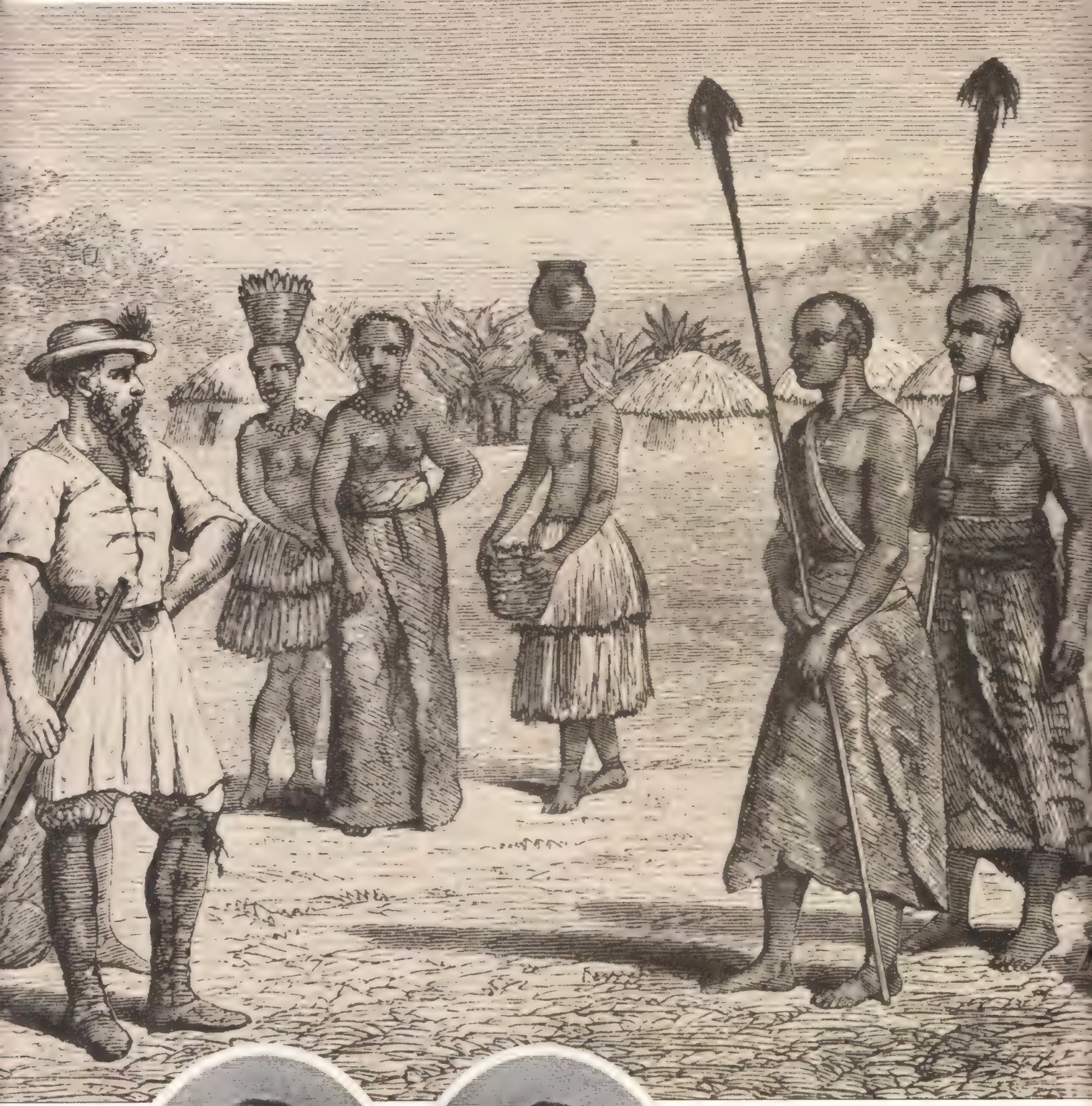
Samuel and Florence travelled slowly and methodically to their goal. When delayed, they set about building houses, planting vegetables and roaming the country in search of wild game.

During this trip they came to hate the slave-trade and its resultant havoc, a reaction in strange contrast to their conviction – echoing that of Burton, Speke and Grant before them – that the African was no more than a savage child.

Baker's water-colour shows him leaving for Lake Albert, surrounded by a Bunyoran escort, which he described as "My childish ideas of devils – horns, tails and all, excepting the hoofs!"

Baker painted the Obbo, a tribe on the Upper Nile, preparing for a slaving expedition with a war-dance. So extensive was the Arab-dominated slave-trade in this area that all tribes had to enslave their neighbours and act as Arab agents, or be enslaved themselves.

Baker waits impatiently while men sent by the Ugandan King, Kamrasi of Bunyoro, question him. "It is very trying," he wrote scathingly, "to wait here until it pleases these almighty niggers to permit us to pass."



These portraits of Baker and his wife show them suitably clad for their lives as English country gentry. Hungarian-born Florence enjoyed that life, yet she uncomplainingly accompanied her husband on even his most dangerous missions.

II. Rivals for Glory

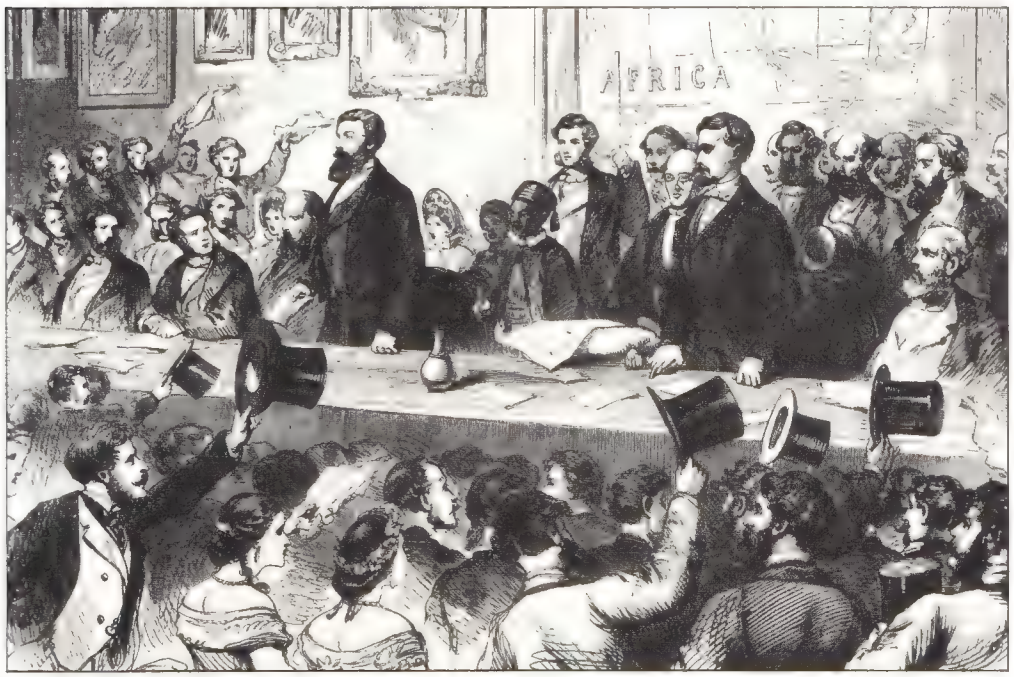
While Petherick accepted his mission, another traveller, a man with adequate means of his own, had decided independently to advance upon the Central African lakes from the south, and race Speke and Burton to the source of the Nile, or assist them if they ran out of supplies. This was Samuel Baker, a well-known big-game hunter from Ceylon, who would be accompanied by his beautiful young Hungarian wife, Florence. Having agreed upon Petherick, the Society tried to divert Baker to Ethiopia to explore the Sobat River. Baker agreed to do so, but with private reservations about what else he and Florence might attempt. The Society had sadly mistaken their man.

In August, 1859, Speke and Grant were in Zanzibar organizing their expedition much as Burton had done, re-engaging Myinyi Mabruki and Sidi Bombay, who were by now seasoned explorers. This time they decided not to take a sectional boat, since Burton's craft had failed to reach Ujiji as planned. They traversed the same route to Kazeh, and Speke declared it to be much easier than Burton had found it – "like marching up the Grand Trunk road in Bengal," he wrote later.

From Kazeh it was the same story of sickness, desertions and importunate or blackmailing chiefs until they reached the Kingdom of Karagwe, where Speke tried to imitate Burton's ethnological and anthropological researches, by taking measurements of the ritual obesity of the King's wives and daughters, a study in vital statistics that upset his more prudish British readers nearly as much as had Burton's candour about sexual habits.

Grant had an ulcerous leg, and had to be left behind, as the next kingdom to the north, Buganda, enforced strictly the regulations about not receiving sick visitors – a quarantine that was reasonable in the light of the epidemics of smallpox and cholera that the Arabs had spread along their trade-routes. The Bugandan monarch Kabaka Mutesa, was none the less beside himself with eagerness to see the white men. As Speke neared Mutesa's palace on the north-west corner of Lake Victoria, the Kabaka ritually killed "fifty big men and four hundred small ones" in preparation for the Englishmen's arrival.

Speke was the first white man to behold the magnificence of the Kabaka's Court. "I had never seen such a sight in Africa before," he wrote. Speke saw it in its pristine condition, before outside influences affected its customs, and anthropologists still study his account with care.



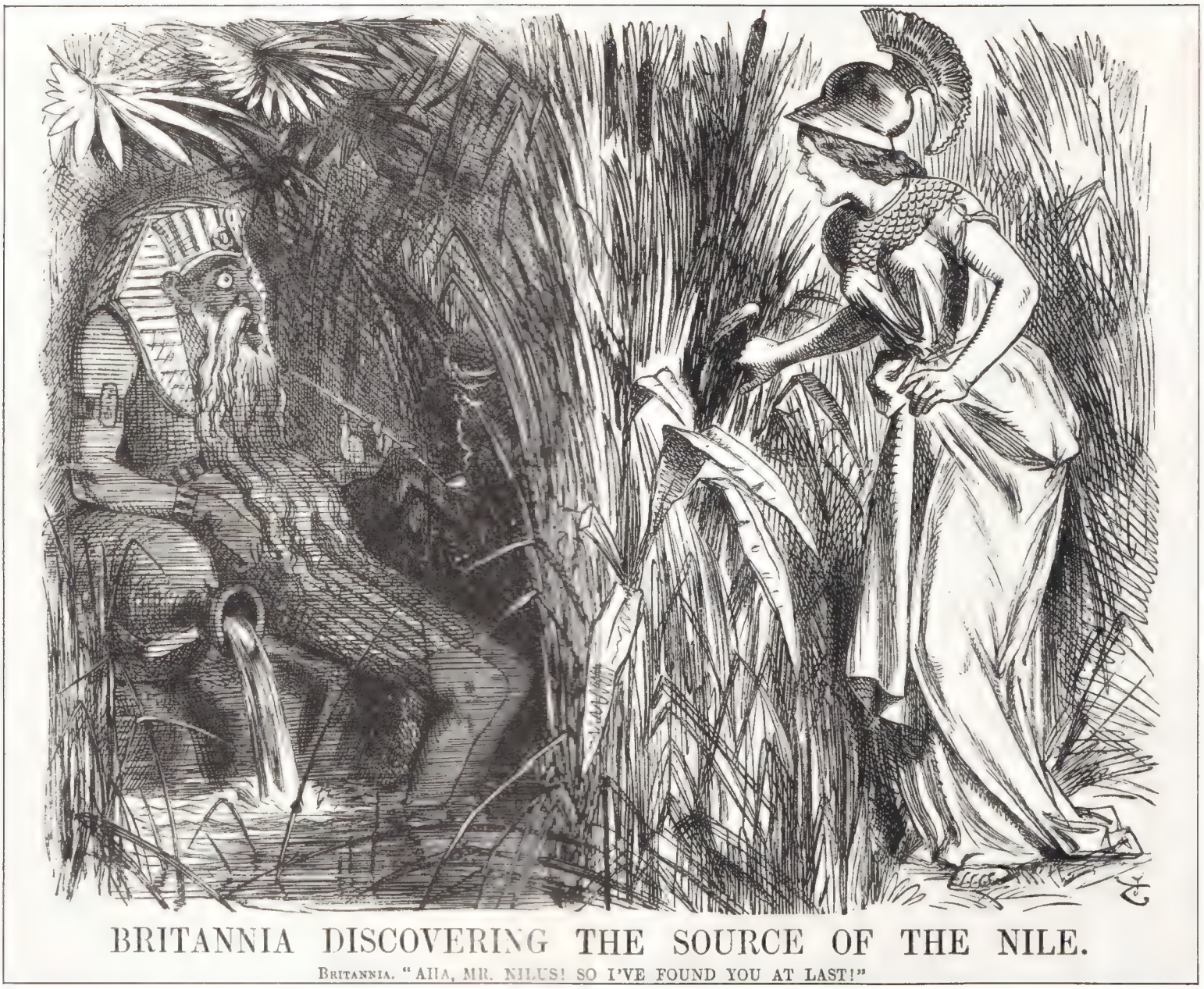
Speke and Grant, standing proudly at the reception given by the Royal Geographical Society, received so enthusiastic an ovation that several of that august Society's windows were broken.

Speke insisted upon being treated with dignity, assuming the role of a British Royal Prince for the occasion. He declined to live in a hut provided outside the palace area, and refused to sit on the ground in accordance with Buganda custom, insisting on using a stool he had with him. He also refused, to the terror of the courtiers, to wait the prescribed period before being admitted to the Kabaka's presence, and left when his patience expired. He had to be coaxed back to the palace. All of this was in Victorian eyes the proper demeanour before savages, however impressive might be the barbaric splendour achieved by the builders of their capitals.

Speke was impressed by Mutesa whom he described as "a good-looking young man of 25 . . . sitting on a red blanket spread upon a square platform of royal grass, encased in tiger grass reeds, scrupulously dressed in a new *mbugu* [a toga-like cloak of bark-cloth]. The hair of his head was cut short excepting at the top, where it was combed into a high ridge running from stem to stern like a cock's comb." Mutesa was as delighted as a child by Speke's gifts. He ordered a boy courtier to see if one of the new rifles would kill a man, a capability that the boy quickly proved.

Speke was soon required by etiquette to call upon the Queen Mother, and put his lessons from Burton to good use. He quickly became familiar with her, accepting the position of consulting physician on her gynaecological and sexual problems, and flirting gallantly but platonically with her, until she, too, was enchanted with the blond stranger. Speke used his growing influence over mother and son to forward his plans to explore the lake, and to return either down the Nile to Khartoum or through Masailand to the coast, which Mutesa said was a quicker and perfectly practicable route.

With the arrival of Grant and his porters, the two explorers determined to leave, despite the lamentations of the Kabaka, who felt he was learning so much about the outside world. At last, on July 7, 1862, after the Kabaka had killed one of his wives as an expression of regret at



BRITANNIA DISCOVERING THE SOURCE OF THE NILE.

BRITANNIA. "AHA, MR. NILUS! SO I'VE FOUND YOU AT LAST!"

A *Punch* cartoon of 1863 relates Speke's discovery to the legend that declared the Nile's source to be a fountain springing from a pitcher.

their departure, they moved on, but separately. Speke reserved to himself the discovery of the outlet – the beginning of the Nile – from the lake, at a place called "the Stones." Grant, outwardly acquiescent but inwardly upset (he most uncharacteristically thrashed his servant a few days after), led the main column to the Court of Kamrasi, the Mugama of Bunyoro-Kitara. Speke found "the Stones," which he named Ripon Falls, and tried to descend the Nile by canoe, but was turned back by hostile natives, and therefore marched west to join Grant at the Mugama's Court.

The Mugama proved to be a different customer than had the Kabaka. His reception of Speke and Grant was surly and suspicious. He stripped them systematically of almost all their goods, including Speke's 50-guinea chronometer, before he let them proceed; but in return he gave them one valuable piece of information – news of another great lake to the west, Luta Nzige (later named Lake Albert) which received the Nile from Lake Victoria. But the explorers, lacking Petherick's reinforcements, could not take advantage of this information. Reduced to beggary, they staggered southwards to Faloro where they met Wad-el-Mek, one of de Bono's agents, a Sudanese officer in the Egyptian service. Speke and Grant, with el-Mek's slave- and ivory-bloated caravan reaching Gondokoro in the Sudan on February 3, 1863.

It was not Petherick who met them there under the Union Jack, but Samuel and Florence Baker, who were stranded for lack of porters, their own having mutinied. The Bakers' supplies were still ample, and Speke and Grant replenished their stocks. When Petherick and his wife arrived soon afterwards Speke treated them coldly; Speke started another vendetta, refusing Petherick's help, and later insinuating that Petherick had failed to meet him (for all that Speke was 14 months late) to go slave-raiding.

To the Bakers, Speke was all affability, and when Baker was cast down at being

The redoubtable Florence Baker usually wore crinolines on her travels with her husband though, when sodden, she changed into men's clothes.

forestalled at Lake Victoria, Speke told him that there was a lesser prize to be won by locating and mapping Luta Nzige; this proposal had the additional advantage that, if Baker was successful, his work would probably strengthen Speke's case to have found the true outlet of the Nile. Speke then sailed down-river in Baker's boats to Khartoum and telegraphed Sir Roderick Murchison that "the Nile is settled!"

But it was far from settled. Speke had a hero's welcome once more in London in June, 1863. Most geographers were inclined to agree that he had substantiated his earlier claim that the Nile rose in a majestic lake, which must be called Lake Victoria just as Africa's greatest waterfall ("the smoke that thunders") on the Zambezi had been named the Victoria Falls by Livingstone. The India Office paid off all his debts, the Society gave him its Gold Medal for his discovery of 1857, and the Emperor Napoleon III of France offered to finance his next expedition to clear up all remaining questions.

In December, 1863, however, Consul Burton, who had been posted to Dahomey in West Africa returned home and began to organize criticism of Speke's claims. Speke answered them as far as he could in his *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*, published in 1864. This is a masterpiece of Victorian observation and exploration, owing much to Burton, but much inferior in style and imagination.

The weakness of Speke's case, of course, was twofold: he had not circumnavigated Lake Victoria, thus failing to prove that his sightings of the northern and southern shores were of the same continuous sheet of water; and he had not sailed down-river from "the Stones" continuously to a known point on the Nile, such as Faloro. With unaccountable inaccuracy he put the Ripon Falls at between lat. 4° and 5°N. (whereas it is almost 0°). As Egyptian expeditions had penetrated to lat. 3°N. without encountering the northern shore of the huge lake, Livingstone, among others, was totally unconvinced. The matter, it was decided, should be debated at the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, in Bath in September, 1864.

Laurence Oliphant made sure of a good news-story from the rivals by telling Burton that Speke had said that if he appeared on the platform Speke would kick him. Burton had become rather uncertain himself about his objections to Speke's claims, but upon hearing this threat he blew up and stormed, "By God, he *shall* kick me!" Both men came to Bath. But Burton's wife Isabel, observing Speke on the morning before the debate, noted that his face "was full of sorrow, yearning and perplexity."

The confrontation never took place. Speke had always calmed his nerves by going out and shooting something, and so it was at Bath; he went off to shoot partridges and while climbing a wall his gun went off. He fell mortally wounded. Some people at the time thought it was suicide, Speke having been hounded to it by Burton; but the evidence is that it was an accident. The news was broken to the audience as Burton stood on the platform. Trying to control the tremble in his voice, he read a paper on Dahomey, returned to his hotel, broke down and wept. The feud was over.

But geographers were still divided, and Livingstone was dispatched on his last, fatal journey to clear everything up. He too failed, and it was left to Stanley to show that, with some modifications, Speke's inspiration in 1859 had been right.

While the battle between Burton and Speke blazed, two other explorers were adding further important knowledge, even if it fell short of being conclusive, about the Nile's sources. Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Baker had hurried south in search of Luta Nzige as soon as they could hire a troop of el-Mek's porters; their own had deserted, suborned by the slavers who loathed seeing Britons, with their abhorrence of slavery, poking into the preserves where they acquired their slaves. The Bakers' first objective was Bunyoro,

where they assumed that they could get guides to take them to the lake.

In his background, Baker was akin to Grant and Speke. He was a practical man who shot animals with profound sympathy but deadly accuracy with a rifle designed by himself. His experience included the creation of an English colony village in Ceylon and the construction of a railway in the Balkans. Born in the same year as Burton, his upbringing was conventional, and he had considerable means, because the Bakers, with a respectable lineage back to the Tudors, had built their fortunes on West Indian sugar and slavery. Instead of entering a university, young Baker, newly married, was sent with his brother to a family plantation in Mauritius. But he tired of that island when he found nothing to shoot, and so was drawn to constructive adventure in Ceylon.

The man is well summed up by his introduction to a section on big-game shooting in one of the several books which he wrote on the subject and which were highly thought of in London's clubland:

"The character of the nation is beautifully displayed in all our rules for hunting, shooting, fishing, fighting, etc.: a feeling of fair-play pervades every amusement. Who would shoot a hare in form? Who would hit a man when down? A Frenchman would do these things and might be no bad fellow after all. . . . They take every advantage while we give every advantage."

Baker the sportsman was also a family man of the matured Victorian type. To his Ceylon pioneer settlement he took his young wife and there, amid its hardships, ministering to his comforts, she produced five children, four of whom survived; worn out, she died during a trip home.

Baker handed over his children to relatives and hurried to Hungary to forget his loss in railway-building; what that started, Fräulein Florence Ninian von Sass completed. She was lovely, 15 years younger than he, and also tragic, desiring to turn her back completely on some terrible past, which was never fully explained. This blotting out (she had, it was said, seen her father and brothers killed) was so total that spiteful tongues in London soon had the rumour going the rounds that Baker had purchased her at a slave-auction in Budapest.

Purchased or wooed, she was a perfect choice for an explorer. His mind was turning to Africa and she accompanied him as a matter of course; nor did she ever flinch. In several crises he owed his life to her cool resource; she was virtually second in command. "Mrs. Baker was not a *screamer*," he wrote, "in the moment of suspected danger a touch on my sleeve was considered sufficient warning."

During the period when Speke and Grant were making their way to Buganda, the Bakers were making a thorough exploration of the region between the Atbara River, a tributary to the Nile, and the Ethiopian highlands. He and Florence – in her crinoline – mapped and hunted for months, then returned to Khartoum via the Blue Nile and prepared to sail southwards. They engaged boats and porters, but it soon became clear that the slaving interest, which included the Governor (thought by the Bakers to be an old friend) hoped to stop them; Baker embarked his men, ran up the Union Jack, and left. At Gondokoro he learned the truth; ivory trading was a bagatelle, the real trade was "kidnapping and murder." They were stranded in a "colony of cut-throats," and but for Speke's arrival they would probably have got no further.

After starting on their journey to Luta Nzige, it took them from March 26, 1863, to January 25, 1864, to reach Mrooli, near the Karuma Rapids, the capital of the Mugama. For part of the time during this portion of the trip, Florence was left, with perfect safety, in charge of Katchiba, Chief of Obbo, while Samuel went off after elephants; this interlude caused much tut-tutting when Baker's book, *The Albert Nyanza*, appeared subsequently.

When they arrived at Mrooli, Florence had to be carried in a litter, for she was too weakened by fever to stand. They were admitted to the King's "presence," not knowing that this was Kamrasi's double, a younger brother named M'Gambi, who, however, was word-perfect in demanding their goods and despising their offerings.

In the end, Baker had but one valuable left: Florence. The "King" demanded her before he would let Baker depart. Baker drew his revolver and told M'Gambi that if he asked again he was a dead man whatever else happened, while Florence gave the African her reactions "with a face as amiable as Medusa's"; her black maid-servant was happy to translate for M'Gambi's benefit. The "King," Baker wrote, retreated "with an air of astonishment. . . . Don't be angry! I had no intention of offending you by asking you for your wife; I will give you a wife, if you want one, and I thought you might have no objection to give me yours." They were, soon afterwards, provided with porters and guides to the lake.

They had both been ill, but worse was to follow. Crossing the Kafi River, Florence became unconscious with what Baker took to be sunstroke followed by brain-fever. She was carried in a litter for several marches and finally a grave was dug; but she revived and insisted that, dead or alive, she would reach the lake.

continued on p. 1030

When an angry rhinoceros charged Baker's tethered horse, that experienced hunter loosed off a shot that splashed grit in the animal's face and frightened it off.

A ROMANTIC HERO IN DECLINE

Richard Burton's epic journey in 1858 to the lakes region of Central Africa was his last great expedition. The romantic explorer and adventurer found himself stifled by a Victorian Establishment enraged by his unrepentant contempt for accepted standards of behaviour and infuriated by his life-long interest in erotica: he had already produced a frank report on homosexual brothels in India and was to translate two Eastern love-manuals, the *Kama Sutra* and *The Perfumed Garden*.

The first link in the chain that bound him was forged by his marriage to a fanatical Roman Catholic, Isabel Arundell. She symbolized much that Burton fought against all his life: bigotry, prudery and a cloying sentimentality that drove him away from her for years at a time. Yet the marriage lasted. She adored him from the moment she saw him, and he appeared to become more and more dependent on her as time went by.

Isabel, an impoverished aristocrat, brought no money to the marriage, and Burton had to find a job. Two insultingly minor diplomatic posts in Fernando Po and Santos finally led to a top position as Consul in Damascus. Not only was he back in the East he loved, but his career seemed to be moving in a forward direction.

But success was to elude him once again. All the groups in the cosmopolitan city of Damascus seemed to have their own grudge against Burton, and the Foreign Office, always wary of its controversial servant, recalled him. Though he was later officially exonerated, his career was ruined.

Eventually the Burtons arrived in the diplomatic backwater of Trieste, where Burton worked hard at finishing his translation of *The Arabian Nights* and was deep into a new translation of *The Perfumed Garden* when he died in 1890. Hysterically rejecting the idea that her husband had died in a state of sin, Isabel persuaded a peasant priest that he still lived and could be received into the Church he had mocked while he was alive.

Soon after his death, in an anguished but short-sighted attempt to safeguard her husband's reputation from further attacks, Isabel burned all his unpublished manuscripts and copious journals. As a result of this, much of Burton's character, interests and work will remain forever enigmatic.

The bitter and introverted Richard and the clinging Isabel, pose bleakly in the clothes and make-up of their beloved Arabia, shortly before Burton's death in 1890.

These illustrations of Sindbad (left) and Aladdin (below left) come from Burton's first limited edition of his translation of *The Arabian Nights*, the book that brought sinister and erotic overtones to the tales told to Victorian children. The books were an immediate success, passed round from hand to hand by a British public fascinated by Burton's frank rendering of the 1,001 tales.

The Burtons' tomb in the London suburb of Mortlake, conceived and built by Isabel, was an Arab tent sculpted in marble, filled with camel bells and topped by a cross and crescent.

On March 14, 1864, they beheld it and Baker named it Albert after the recently deceased Prince Consort. "Here," he exulted, "was the reward of all our labour – for the years of tenacity with which we had toiled through Africa: England had won the sources of the Nile!"

After invoking the Almighty's blessing they staggered down to the shore, 1,500 feet below. Baker, however, much exaggerated his prize. He reached the lake at the southern end, yet was deceived by a haze from the marshes into thinking it continued 100 miles or more into the distance; nor did he see the Ruwenzori Mountains whose run-off fed it. Instead, hiring a canoe, they paddled northwards till they found both a river flowing into the lake, which Baker correctly assumed came from Lake Victoria, and the Nile flowing out of the lake. They paddled up the river flowing into the lake, only to be stopped by an awesome cataract which he named Murchison Falls. Since Baker could not go round the waterfall, he could not fully confirm Speke's theory that the Nile rose in Lake Victoria.

Instead he and Florence struggled back towards Mrooli on Lake Kyoga. But their porters deserted them and they seemed likely to die in a swamp. Lying side by side in a hut, sick and almost helpless, they sang sentimental and patriotic songs, while the rain beat endlessly down. They were saved by the Kamrasi's need for riflemen for his proposed war against his neighbour, Rionga. Baker craftily answered Kamrasi's summons by saying that he would have to discuss a wartime alliance with the King in person. In this way, he and his wife were rescued.

When Baker, attired in a Highland kilt and bonnet (often a recourse used by Britons in the 19th Century to startle savages), finally entered the presence of the King, he found that he was facing the real Kamrasi. The Mugama thought his previous deception of the strangers a triumph of statecraft.

Before discussions for the "alliance" had got very far, Rionga's army, reinforced by an Egyptian slaving vanguard, attacked. Kamrasi was about to take to the bush when Baker coolly ran up the Union Jack and ordered the advancing forces to respect it – and all under its protection. Rionga politely retired. After restoring their health, the Bakers were able to start for home.

Part of the time, as usual, they travelled in the company of slave-caravans. Florence looked after a flock of child slaves, who were infatuated by her. She was heartbroken to leave them behind – she never had children of her own. The Bakers took ivory-boats downriver to Gondokoro, and thence to Khartoum. There they hired camels to cross to Suakin (now Port Sudan).

On their return to London in 1865 their account of their discoveries somewhat strengthened Speke's case. But their evidence was not regarded as completely conclusive. Baker thought it possible that Lake Albert was the major source, Lake Victoria the minor one.

Within a few months Baker was knighted for his work. It was secondary to Burton's or Speke's, but he had not used a penny of public money, his bluff manner was acceptable, and his talents as a sportsman were considered highly commendable. He received the Royal Geographical Society's Gold Medal, purchased a country-house, and wrote to *The Times* on African questions. In 1869 he was asked to accompany the Prince of Wales on his visit to Egypt, the Nile and the new Suez Canal.

He accepted, and soon found himself launched upon a new career. The Khedive Ismail, flushed with the glory of the completion of the Suez Canal, had vast plans for modernizing and aggrandizing Egypt. At a banquet for the Prince and Princess, he took Sir Samuel aside and asked him if he would accept the Governorship of Egypt's Equatoria region, annex the great lakes down to Lake Victoria or further, and suppress the slave-trade.

Sir Samuel Baker stands resplendant in the uniform of a Pasha of the Ottoman Empire, complete with medals presented to him by his employer, Ismail, Khedive of Egypt.

The order of priorities was reversed in his proposal to Baker, for while the Khedive knew that the trade was indispensable to the region and was almost impossible to suppress, he also knew that a prominent Englishman would hardly agree to serve unless an anti-slavery proviso were included in his commission.

Burton would have seen through the game in a moment but Baker fell for it, and the Prince of Wales thought it an excellent plan. The bankers financing the Khedive were naturally impressed at the new and dazzling prospect.

Sir Samuel Baker's second journey up the Nile to Bunyoro was doomed to failure. For, though it established the Egyptian flag temporarily at Mrooli, it tended to open the country more widely than ever to slaving. But Baker Pasha (his new Egyptian title) did not anticipate this outcome when in 1870 he made plans for an expedition of 1,700 troops on 50 sail-boats and ten steamers to journey up to Gondokoro. He took his nephew, Lieutenant Julian Baker, R.N., as an aide-de-camp, and, of course, Lady Baker. Once again this indomitable woman was to prove herself an able second in command when, subsequently, the expedition got into trouble.

In Khartoum Baker found that nothing whatever had been done about the sailing fleet, which he had to improvise on the spot himself, nor were any steamers ready until much later. As he wryly noted: "The Governor-General [of Khartoum], Jaffer Pasha, had formerly shown me much kindness on my arrival at Suakin. . . . I had therefore reckoned on him as a friend, but no personal considerations could palliate the secret hatred of the expedition." Nevertheless, Baker trusted the Khedive, and on February 8, 1870, he sailed upstream with 33 vessels.

He found the area totally devastated by the slave-raiding that had occurred since he had last visited it in 1864: "The rich soil on the river banks had been abandoned. . . . Villages once crowded had entirely disappeared . . . the night formerly discordant with the creaking of countless waterwheels was now silent as death." And this was the sort of empire Baker was pledged to extend, in order to supply black flesh to Asian fields and harems.

To reach Gondokoro, Baker and his 1,200 troops, headed by his *corps d'élite*, which he called the "Forty Thieves," now had to hack canals through the Sudd. This is a mass of weed, mud and vegetable debris which blocks the main channels of the Upper Nile when the flood is exceptionally high, as it was that year. Despite fantastic efforts the Sudd defeated them. They had to set up a new base at the Nile-Sobat confluence and await the 1871 flood.

Baker built a town and fort, and while doing so learned that the "trade" of the area above Khartoum had been leased by the Khedive to Agad & Company, whose agent was Abu Saud, an implacable opponent of Baker's main objective, the ending of the slave-trade. "I was," wrote Baker, "to annex a country that was already leased out by the government." Even so he persevered.

He tackled the Sudd a second time with 58 ships and a steamer. This time he was successful though his force took heavy casualties from sickness. It required three months of cutting canals and damming channels to float the flotilla through to clear water and to Gondokoro, which Baker annexed and renamed Ismailia.

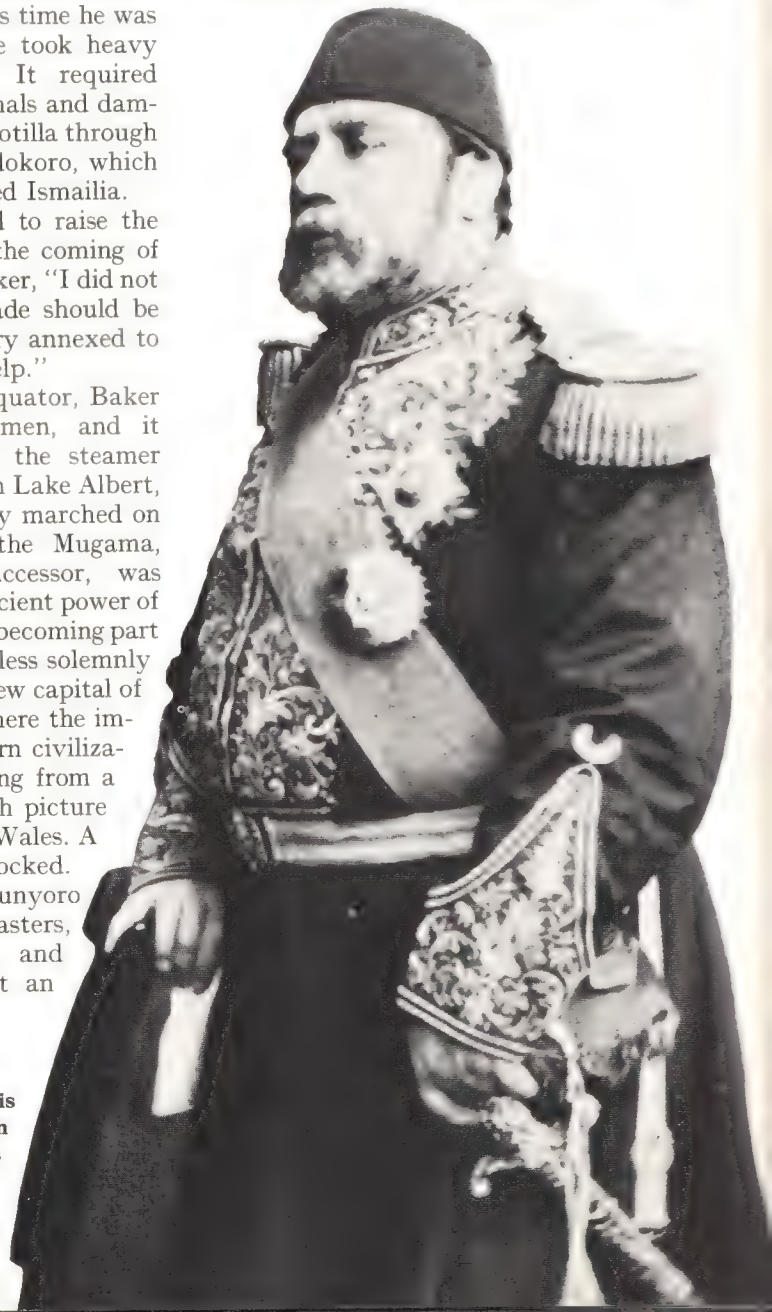
Abu Saud slipped ahead to raise the Bunyoro country against the coming of the new Pasha but, said Baker, "I did not despair. . . . The slave-trade should be suppressed and the territory annexed to the Equator, with God's help."

For the march to the Equator, Baker could only muster 212 men, and it proved impossible to get the steamer above the rapids to garrison Lake Albert, as had been intended. They marched on foot to Masindi, where the Mugama, Kabarega, Kamrasi's successor, was thinking of restoring the ancient power of Bunyoro-Kitara and not of becoming part of Egypt. He was nevertheless solemnly annexed by Baker, and a new capital of thatched huts was built where the impressive resources of modern civilization were displayed, ranging from a musical-box to a full-length picture of H.R.H. the Princess of Wales. A mass of trade goods was stocked.

Instead of trading, the Bunyoro rose against their new masters, the camp was attacked, and Baker was forced to beat an ignominious retreat.

Lady Baker marched with the column, tending the wounded, losing her servants but bearing a charmed life, and acting as Baker's eyes when the mêlée got thick. Only three whites, supported by some 100 Egyptian soldiers, finally entered the Foweira Stockade. There Baker left a detachment to hold it, and hurried on to Fatiko, where at last Abu Saud's men, led by Wad-el-Mek, attacked while Baker was unarmed. But Lady Baker ("my good little officer") had his rifle and revolver-belt ready, and in a moment he was leading a bayonet charge. Wad-el-Mek submitted to the redoubtable pair and was made an officer of the Khedive's forces after he took an oath of loyalty.

Baker's term as Governor of Equatoria had done no more than prepare the way for his successor. This was to have immense significance: by the terms of the contract, Baker's successor had to be British, and he was General Charles Gordon



The devious Ismail, shown here in his glittering viceregal attire, had acquired in Paris enough understanding of Western ways to command the loyalty of Englishmen.

BAKER PASHA, RULER OF EQUATORIA

"The Forty Thieves," ex-convicts dressed in scarlet and armed with Snider rifles, were turned by Baker into a loyal personal bodyguard.

At the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, Ismail of Egypt asked Samuel Baker to annex Equatoria (the Upper Nile region) for Egypt and to wipe out the slave-trade there. Baker jumped at the chance.

In just under a year, Baker assembled at Khartoum the biggest and best-equipped force Central Africa had ever seen. There were a fleet of British-made boats that could be taken apart (including a 100-foot paddle-steamer), 5,000 camels to transport the boat sections, stores for four years, and pop-guns, tin whistles, musical-boxes and a magnetic battery with which to impress the natives and establish trade. Baker, accompanied by his wife, set off with 1,400 troops to fight their way through the swampy wastes of the Sudd on their mission – one that would ultimately prove impossible.

This drawing shows the rare "wild-headed stork" ignoring Baker's boat stuck fast in the rotting vegetation of the fever-ridden Sudd. As was his habit, Samuel Baker, the hunter, shot the bird.

Camels carried the boilers and sections of the boats, or dragged them on gun-carriages. Some parts were slung between camels on fir poles imported from Trieste.

Freedom through Force

Baker's job was to persuade the natives of Equatoria to accept his protection, both to save them from the slavers and as a first step in achieving "civilization."

Some chiefs, like Rot Jarma, who lived close to the Nile – the slavers' highway – were happy to comply. Others, like Kabarega of Bunyoro, safer in Uganda, could not accept this challenge to their power. Kabarega attacked the Pasha's impressive camp near Masindi. Baker's superior weapons defeated him. While some of "The Forty Thieves" blasted into the natives with their Snider rifles, others ran forward with rockets to fire the Chief's capital.

This was the most difficult of the many challenges that faced Baker. A year later he could write: "A paternal government now extended its protection through lands hitherto a field for . . . slavery."

Baker's assessment of his success was premature; the slavers soon resumed their trade which survived until the 1880s.

The "saucy hippopotomi," as Baker called them, were a constant danger. This one overturned a zinc boat and chewed up Baker's favourite dingy before eight of his bullets killed it.

The Bakers reassure Chief Rot Jarma, who is covered in red ochre and grease, that his troops will protect the tribe from the unwelcome attentions of the slavers.

Flames pour from the huts of Masindi as part of Baker's attack. By protecting their flanks with these 80-foot flames, "The Forty Thieves" were able to advance and drive the Bunyorans out of town.

III. The Search Ends

In Britain Baker faced a barrage of criticism by the Liberals for the warfare he had engaged in, but he defended himself successfully. In reality his work had laid the foundation for the later expansion of the British Empire into the region: the cost of subdividing Equatoria helped to bankrupt the Khedive; this led to Britain's occupation of Egypt to protect its investment; the growth of foreign advisers heightened Egyptian nationalism; nationalism led to the destruction of both Baker's and Gordon's work at the hands of the fanatic and militant Mahdist movement and this in its turn led to British control of the Sudan. The criticisms of Baker were then forgotten, and his achievements stood out more boldly.

Sir Richard Burton died in 1890 while he was working on another marvellous compendium of Arab lore and curiosa, *The Perfumed Garden*. His wife thrust the holy wafer into his dead mouth, and, to seal her husband's conversion to Rome, then burned his unfinished works and all his other manuscripts. Two years later Grant died, to be followed by Sir Samuel Baker in 1893, as he was planning a trip to Somalia to shoot lions. Lady Baker died at their home, Sandford Orleigh, in 1916, the last of the Nile explorers.

When Florence died, Britain had finally become master of the entire river's length and of the lake and river system that distinguishes the Rift Valley of Africa down to the south end of Lake Nyasa (Malawi). It required, however, the fatal last quest of Livingstone, and the work of Henry M. Stanley, finally to establish in 1889 that the prime source of the White Nile was Lake Victoria, Lake Albert being a link in the run-off system northward, while Ptolemy's Crophi and Mophi were the Ruwenzori Mountains.

Of course much remained to be done: only the basic features of Central Africa had been established. As a missionary, Alexander Mackay, remarked at the time, "to talk of Africa having been 'opened up' by the passing through it of Speke, Grant, Stanley and Cameron, is to talk of a large pumpkin being opened up by the passing through it of a fine needle." A vast deal of exploration would be needed to fill the blank of Africa ❧

The Ripon Falls, the accepted source of the Nile, are submerged today in a vast hydroelectric scheme.

Officer, 1st Life Guards, 1834

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